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May 27, 2014

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

We want to thank you for immediately initiating a nationwide access review and a national face-to-face audit at all VA medical facilities.

While we are pleased that the VA initiated the access review and audit, it is critical that this audit is effective. The latest report that 29 VA medical facilities in 15 states are under investigation by the Inspector General and the allegations of schemes to misreport patient wait time data at VA facilities across the country underscore the importance of this audit.

This audit must specifically review appointment scheduling and consult scheduling practices at all VA medical facilities and examine the accuracy of the data each VA medical facility is using to report patient wait times to the VA Central Office. We are concerned about the comprehensiveness of the audit after it was described during the May 15 Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing. This type of audit requires a close examination of appointment records and electronic waiting lists, as well as interviews of employees who schedule appointments and surveys of all employees who have knowledge of appointment wait times for patients. While we understand and share a desire to complete the audit with all due urgency, we are not convinced that a thorough and comprehensive audit can be completed in just a few weeks.


A thorough and comprehensive audit is necessary so the VA is able to accurately assess the real state of patient wait times, manage patient care and address access problems before these problems put more veterans at risk, and so the VA and Congress identify root causes of long patient wait times and work together to develop solutions to ensure that our veterans receive timely, world-class health care.

We also urge the VA to immediately address inaccurate reporting practices and hold accountable those employees who did not follow VA Central Office policies and procedures. Our veterans are demanding answers and want VA employees to know they will be held accountable by the VA for violating VA policies and procedures. These actions will help restore veterans' trust in the VA medical system, which has been damaged due to the troubling allegations of long patient wait times and the misreporting of these patient wait times at VA facilities throughout the country.

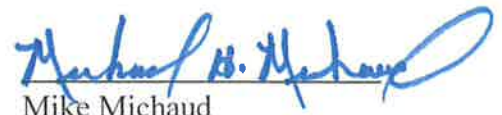
Upon completion of the review and audit, we ask that the VA provide us with a copy of the conclusions drawn from the audit, and the actions the VA will take to improve scheduling processes, increase access to care, and ensure the validity of the data the VA Central Office receives so that accurate data on patient wait times are reported to Congress. Ensuring the reliability of the data you have regarding delays faced by veterans will enable you to address access issues while better enabling us to ensure that the veterans we represent are getting the health care they have earned.

Again, thank you for initiating the system wide audit. With a more thorough understanding of these problems, we can all work together to find solutions and improve veteran access to world-class health care.


Sincerely,



Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress




Mike Michaud
Member of Congress



Beto O'Rourke
Member of Congress



Gloria Negrete McLeod
Member of Congress



David Scott
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a tall, thin vertical stroke on the left, a small loop at the top, and a horizontal stroke that ends in a small arrowhead pointing to the right.

Ami Bera
Member of Congress